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CARTESIANISM AND THE FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVE

abstract

Descartes's influence is so great that it is often assumed that any philosopher who emphasizes a first-person perspective, as I do, must be a Cartesian. I want to challenge the assumption that I am a Cartesian by setting out my view of the first-person perspective and its importance for being a person. Then, I shall enumerate the ways in which my conception of the first-person perspective differs from Descartes's. Finally, I shall consider an alternative interpretation of Descartes, proposed by Bernard Williams. According to the alternative interpretation, Descartes was aiming at a wholly objective "absolute conception" of natural reality. I shall argue that, because of the first-person perspective, no "absolute conception" can be a full account of natural reality.

keywords

Cartesianism, first-person perspective, Bernard Williams, absolute conception

René Descartes has a good claim to be the originator of first-personal philosophy. Descartes's first-person outlook permeates his philosophy. Indeed, Descartes begins his epistemological inquiries by examining his own beliefs to discover which ones might be false. Even today, Descartes's influence is so broad that it is often assumed that any philosopher who emphasizes a first-person perspective, as I do, must be a Cartesian. I want to challenge the assumption that I must be a Cartesian by setting out my view of the first-person perspective and its importance for being a person. Then, I shall enumerate the ways in which my conception of the first-person perspective differs from Descartes's. Finally, I shall consider an alternative interpretation of Descartes, according to which he was aiming at a wholly objective "absolute conception" of natural reality, and I shall argue that such an absolute conception cannot be a full account of reality.

- The First-Person Perspective**

1. On my view, a human person begins existence constituted by an organism, but is not identical to the organism that constitutes her. For purposes of this paper, I shall leave the essential feature of embodiment aside. What matters here is another essential property of persons, a first-person perspective. A first-person perspective is a dispositional property that members of the kind *person* have essentially.

A first-person perspective is a complex property that has two stages, a rudimentary stage that a person is born with and a robust stage that a person develops as she acquires a language. At the rudimentary stage, a first-person perspective is a nonconceptual capacity shared by human infants and nonhuman animals. It is the capacity of a conscious subject to perceive and interact with entities in the world from a first-personal "origin". At the robust stage, a first-person perspective is a conceptual capacity displayed by language-users; it is the capacity to conceive of oneself as oneself from the first-person, without identifying oneself by a name, description or third-person demonstrative.

Born with a rudimentary first-person perspective and a remote (or second-order) capacity to develop a robust first-person perspective, a human person gets to the robust stage in the natural course of development. As she learns a language, a person acquires numerous concepts, among which is a self-concept that she can use to conceive of herself as herself in the first-person. At the rudimentary stage, she can do things intentionally; at the robust

stage, she can conceive of herself as doing things. At the rudimentary stage, she can perceive things in the world; at the robust stage, she can conceive of herself as perceiving things. Although the robust stage of the first-person perspective requires language, it is exhibited throughout one's life in characteristically human activities – from making contracts to celebrating anniversaries to seeking fame by entering beauty contests.

So, a person with a robust first-person perspective can manifest her personhood in a much richer and more variegated way than can an infant who has only a rudimentary first-person perspective. What makes you now – with your robust first-person perspective – the same person that you were when you were an infant – with only a rudimentary first-person perspective – is that there is a single exemplification of the dispositional property of having a first-person perspective both then and now – regardless of the vast differences in its manifestations over the years. For example, an infant may manifest a first-person perspective (at the rudimentary stage) by drawing back from a looming figure, and an adult may manifest a first-person perspective (at the robust stage) by making a will. A human person from infancy through maturity until death (and perhaps beyond) is a single exemplifier of a first-person perspective – whether rudimentary or robust. Now in greater detail.

2. The Rudimentary First-Person Perspective

Let us start with the rudimentary first-person perspective. The stage of the rudimentary first-person perspective is shared by human and nonhuman animals; the rudimentary first-person perspective connects animals that constitute persons with other animals. A human infant is a person constituted by a human animal. An infant is born with minimal consciousness and intentionality, which are the ingredients of a rudimentary first-person perspective. A person comes into existence when a human organism develops to the point of being able to support a rudimentary first-person perspective. The person constituted by the organism – the new entity in the world – has a first-person perspective essentially.

The rudimentary first-person perspective does not depend on linguistic or conceptual abilities. The rudimentary first-person perspective is found in many biological species, perhaps all mammals, and seems to be subject to gradation or degrees. Among species, consciousness and intentionality seem to dawn gradually (from simpler organisms) and the rudimentary first-person perspective seems to become more fine-grained as it runs through many species in the animal kingdom.

Darwinism offers a great unifying thesis that “there is one grand pattern of similarity linking all life” (Eldredge, 2000, p. 31). Considered in terms

of genetic or morphological properties or of biological functioning, there is no discontinuity between chimpanzees and human animals. In fact, human animals are biologically more closely related to certain kinds of chimpanzees than the chimpanzees are related to gorillas and orangutans¹. Human infants, along with dogs, cows, horses and other non-language-using mammals, also have rudimentary first-person perspectives. So, my view recognizes the continuity between human animals that constitute human infants and higher nonhuman animals that constitute nothing. In this way, the biological continuity of the animal kingdom is unbroken.

But wait! If that is so, then why do I say that a person is only constituted by an animal and not identical to an animal? For this reason: Although there is no discontinuity in the animal world – no *biological* discontinuity – the evolution of human persons (perhaps by natural selection) does introduce an *ontological* discontinuity.

The ontological discontinuity between persons and animals lies in the fact that a human infant – who is not identical to the organism that constitutes her – has a remote capacity to develop a robust first-person perspective.

A nonhuman organism that does not constitute a person may have a rudimentary first-person perspective (as chimpanzees do), but it has no remote capacity to develop a robust first-person perspective. And this remote capacity distinguishes persons from all other beings.

A remote capacity is a second-order capacity to develop a capacity². For example, a healthy human infant has a *remote* capacity to ride a bicycle. She does not yet have the capacity to ride, but she does have the capacity to acquire the capacity to ride a bike. When the young child learns to ride a bicycle, she then acquires an *in-hand* capacity to ride a bicycle; that is, in certain circumstances (when she has a bicycle available and wants to ride), she actually rides a bicycle and manifests her capacity to ride a bicycle. She may never learn to ride a bike, in which case her remote capacity to ride a bike would not issue in an in-hand capacity to ride a bike. Similarly, even though a remote capacity to develop a robust first-person perspective is an essential property of persons, a person may never actually develop a robust first-person perspective (if, for example, the person had a case of severe autism).

The point is that an infant person has not only a rudimentary first-person perspective, but also has a remote capacity to develop a robust perspective; otherwise the entity would not be a human person. So, the ontological difference between persons and animals lies in the robust first-person

1 Dennett, D.C. (1995), *Darwin's Dangerous idea*, Simon and Schuster, New York, p. 336. Dennett is discussing Jared Diamond's *The Third Chimpanzee*.

2 I found the handy distinction between remote and in-hand capacity in (Pasnau, 2002, p. 115).

perspective and in the remote capacity to develop one. In pre-linguistic persons (like babies), the rudimentary stage of the first-person perspective brings with it the remote capacity to develop a robust first-person perspective. Nonhuman animals have no such remote capacity.

So: What makes persons unique is that only persons have robust first-person perspectives. (If dogs learned to talk and acquired the capacity to conceive of themselves in the first-person, a new kind of entity would come into existence, canine-persons. But the point would still hold: only persons have robust first-person perspectives).

To sum up: The rudimentary stage of a first-person perspective is a nonconceptual stage that entails consciousness and intentionality. The rudimentary stage is what ties us persons to the seamless animal kingdom; the robust stage is what makes us ontologically and morally unique. Now let us turn to what, exactly, a robust first-person perspective is.

3. The Robust First-Person Perspective

Unlike the rudimentary stage, which does not require language or concepts, the robust stage of the first-person perspective is a conceptual stage that entails the peculiar ability to conceive of oneself as oneself in the first-person. Conclusive evidence of a robust first-person perspective comes from use of complex first-person sentences like e.g., “I wonder how I will die,” or “I promise that I will stay with you”³. If I wonder how I will die, or I promise that I will stay with you, then I am thinking of myself as myself; I am not thinking of myself in any third-person way (e.g., not as Lynne Baker, nor as that woman, nor as the only person standing in the room) at all. Even if I had amnesia and did not realize that I was Lynne Baker, I could still wonder how I am going to die. Any entity that can wonder how she – she herself – will die *ipso facto* has a robust first-person perspective and thus is a person. She can understand herself from “within”, so to speak.

In order to have a robust first-person perspective, one must have a concept of oneself as oneself from the first-person – a self-concept. The second occurrence of ‘I’ in “I wonder how I am going to die” expresses a self-concept. It is impossible that two people have the same self-concept (cf. Kripke, 2011, p. 298). A self-concept cannot stand alone; it is a nonqualitative concept that is used only in tandem with other concepts⁴.

3 Hector-Neri Castañeda developed this idea in several papers. See “He: A Study in the Logic of Self-Consciousness”, *Ratio*, 8 (1966), pp. 130-157, and “Indicators and Quasi-Indicators”, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 4 (1967), pp. 85-100.

4 I think that this point suggests that Hume’s famous passage, “When I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble upon some particular impression” (*Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, Section VI, 253) does not imply that a self-concept has no extension, only that a self-concept can be deployed only with other concepts.

If I promise that I will take care of you, then I manifest a robust first-person perspective by expressing a self-concept; but also I manifest mastery of empirical concepts like “promise” and “taking care”. And it is in learning a natural language that one masters these other common empirical concepts that one joins to a self-concept. (Hume was right that when I look inside myself, I always stumble over an impression or – as I would say – a thought; but the moral to draw is that a self-concept cannot stand alone, but is always deployed jointly with other concepts [Hume, 1738/1968]).

On my view, the robust first-person perspective is much more far-reaching than thinking about one’s mental states, or about oneself as the bearer of mental states. Applying for a job, making a contract, accepting an invitation all require a robust first-person perspective. If I wish that I were a movie star, I manifest a robust first-person perspective; but if I wish that LB were a movie star, I do not manifest one – even though I am LB. There is an important ineliminable contrast between my thinking about myself as myself in the first-person, knowing that it is myself whom I am thinking about, and my thinking about someone who is in fact myself without realizing it (Baker, 2013). And this contrast cannot be made without a robust first-person perspective.

To sum up my idea of the first-person perspective: Whereas a *rudimentary* first-person perspective is shared by persons and certain nonhuman animals, a *robust* first-person perspective – the conceptual ability to think of oneself as oneself in the first-person – is unique to persons. Human persons normally traverse a path from the rudimentary to the robust first-person perspective, from consciousness to self-consciousness.

4. Descartes and The First-Person Perspective

Now I want to explore some ways in which my conception of the first-person perspective differs from Descartes’s own conception.

1. Descartes’s allows for thinkers in isolation. Mine does not. Descartes envisioned the possibility that there existed a single person, with a sophisticated ability to entertain thoughts and reason from them. For example, Descartes said (something like), “I seem to be sitting in front of the fire in my dressing gown, but my senses have deceived me before. So, perhaps they are deceiving me now”. I do not want to challenge the validity of the argument or its premises, but rather insist that it is conceptually impossible for a solitary person to have such thoughts. If Descartes had been the only finite entity in the universe, he could not have entertained such thoughts. Why not? Because he could not have acquired the concepts that are the constituents of such thoughts – e.g., *fire* and *dressing gown* – if he did not have a public language, and he could not have had a public language

without a linguistic community.

Mastering a language requires a linguistic community. Wittgenstein pegged why one could not make up a language in isolation: If you did, then there would be no standards of correctness. If you categorized a new item that you took to be of a kind that you “named”, there would be no difference between getting it right and getting it wrong. Wittgenstein avers: “One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we cannot talk about *right*” (Wittgenstein, 1958, par. 258). So, whatever one did in isolation, it would not be to invent a language (see Baker, 2007a; Baker, 2007b). So here is the first difference between my view and Descartes’s: On my view, there can be no thinkers without a linguistic community.

2. Relatedly, Descartes’s thinkers are nonsocial entities. Mine are social entities. On Descartes’s view, there could be isolated thinkers; according to mine, we are essentially social entities. As I argued earlier, robust first-person perspectives are what distinguish persons from everything else in the universe: Although not every person must have a robust first-person perspective, every person must have at least a remote or second-order capacity for one: There could be no persons if there were no robust first-person perspectives. And since a robust first-person perspective requires having a language, and having a language requires that one has a linguistic community, and a linguistic community is a social community, it follows that persons are social entities – on my view, but not on Descartes’s.

3. Descartes appeals to a pure mind. I appeal to nothing but whole embodied persons – to persons and the bodies that constitute them. Descartes thought that there was a pure mind, perhaps a center of an arena of consciousness; whereas on my view, there is no subpersonal mind, soul or self. All my view requires are whole persons constituted by bodies. Persons – whole, embodied persons – are the bearers of properties like anger, regret, belief, knowledge, seeing a parking place, feeling excited, and other so-called “mental” properties. Brains furnish the mechanisms that make the exemplification of these mental properties possible.

In my opinion, any appeal to a mind, soul, or self is just gratuitous. (Saul Kripke recounted a conversation he once had with a nonphilosophical friend about Hume’s misbegotten search for a self. His friend said, “Well, Hume must never have looked in a mirror” [Kripke, 2011, p. 308]. In a way, I agree with the friend: What you see in the mirror is as close as you will get to a self).

4. In the *Meditations*, Descartes’s aim was epistemological (What can I know with certainty?). His tool was his Method of Doubt: Suspend judgment about any of your beliefs that could possibly be false, until you get to beliefs

(if any) that cannot possibly be doubted. Thus, Descartes is not only a foundationalist, but the foundation of knowledge is robustly first-personal. (Each of us is to inspect our own beliefs). For Descartes, what is discerned from the first-person perspective has epistemic primacy. One knows one's own mind better than she knows anything else, and justifies her beliefs about her environment by "inspecting" her own mind.

By contrast, my aim is ontological (What is ontologically required for reality to be as it is?). I do not believe that there is any single rigorous method for finding out what is genuinely real. I do not believe that the first-person always has epistemic primacy. I take it that an object of kind K belongs in ontology: If (1) objects of kind K are not reducible to objects of lower kinds, and if (2) elimination of objects of kind K renders the ontology incomplete. Let me explain: Artifacts – like tables and chairs, bicycles and automobiles – are neither reducible nor eliminable from a complete description of reality. For example, a tractor (an artifact) – cannot be reduced to objects of lower kinds, because something is a tractor only in virtue of there being certain practices, purposes and uses of the thing. (Some tractor-like object that spontaneously coalesced in outer space would not be a tractor, however much it resembled one). And the relevant facts about practices, purposes and uses are not determined by *any* facts about objects of lower kinds than tractors (steering wheel, tires, etc.). So, artifacts are not reducible. Nor are artifacts eliminable. If the ontology left out artifacts, it would not be a complete description of reality.

My method, such as it is, for determining whether something is genuinely real and belongs in ontology is to determine whether it is irreducible and ineliminable. This "method", unlike Descartes's, is highly fallible. On my view, the first-person confers no epistemic justificatory primacy. We need not justify our beliefs about the ways that things are in terms of the ways that they seem or appear to us.

5. Descartes sought a level of reality that was wholly without presuppositions. I do not. On my view there is always a plethora of presuppositions, many of which are clearly empirical.

6. Descartes was a dualist – there are two kinds of finite things, immaterial thinking substances and material extended substances, minds and bodies. On my view there are countless kinds of finite things ("primary kinds"), from tomatoes to diplomas.

7. A related difference – at least between my views and those of some of Descartes's descendants – is that on my view, many of the primary kinds of things are "intention-dependent". That is, they could not exist or occur in worlds in which there were no beings with intentions. These include all sorts

of manufactured goods like bedclothes, doorknobs, and eyeglasses. Social objects like passports and credit cards exist even though their existence depends on our intentions and practices. From this fact, it follows that the would-be distinction between things that are mind-independent and things that are mind-dependent is not fundamental; you can draw such a distinction where you would like, with artifacts on the mind-dependent or mind-independent side, but the distinction has no ontological significance. Dollar bills are as real as rocks.

8. Descartes draws a distinction between “inner” and “outer”, according to which each thinker has infallible access to an inner world – the world of experiences – known directly by “inspection”; the outer world is the world of physical objects, known indirectly only by inference. On my view, this distinction is misdrawn: There is no “inner” transparent realm to which I have infallible access. (Most of us are often mistaken about our own motivations). To say that we have inner lives on my view is just to say that we engage in silent speech.

This comparison of my views and Descartes’s (mostly from the *Meditations*) yields two dissimilar pictures of reality. The only thing that the pictures seem to have in common is that they both countenance a non-objective aspect to natural reality: For Descartes, it is the mind or soul; for me, it is the first-person perspective.

5. An Alternative Interpretation of Descartes?

On the basis of Descartes’s *Meditations*, it seems that Descartes holds that reality is not wholly objective. It seems obvious, does not it, that whereas material substances (e.g., physical objects) are objective, thinking substances (e.g., minds) are not? But maybe there is another interpretation of Descartes, one that would leave his ontology wholly objective. Does Descartes really take reality to include non-objective finite immaterial substances? Although I take the interpretation that I have given of Descartes to be the standard interpretation, perhaps Descartes’s first-person talk in the *Meditations* is just a ladder that can be kicked away after we climb up it.

Consider Bernard Williams’ suggestion in his book *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*. Williams imagines that Descartes is a Pure Enquirer, a truth-gatherer, whose only desire is to maximize the truth-ratio of his beliefs. Descartes’s “indefinitely well-informed and resourceful opponent” (Williams, 1978, p. 57), whose aim is to thwart Descartes in his pursuit of truth, is the fictitious Evil Demon. The Evil Demon gives rise to the “hyperbolic” doubt that there might not be a physical world at all – hyperbolic because it calls into question not just whether I am now dreaming, whether my present perception is veridical, but whether any perception is veridical. On Williams’ view of Descartes, if we can get past this hyperbolic doubt, then we can come to “know truths about the world, and our

conceptions of the world will not be systematically distorted or in error” (Williams, 1978, p. 61). This is so, because Descartes takes it to be self-evident that if any of my perceptions are veridical, then they are caused by things outside of me that the perceptions are perceptions of (Williams, 1978, p. 58). Once Descartes gets the certainty of his own existence and of the existence of a nondeceiving God (in Med. III and IV), he can count on the truth of his perceptions, his clear and distinct ideas. The aim of the project of pure enquiry, Williams suggests, is knowledge of the world, “knowledge of a reality which exists independently ... of any thought or experience. Knowledge of what is there *anyway*” (Williams, 1978, p. 64).

Each of us has experiences of the world and ways of conceptualizing it, which give rise to beliefs. Williams calls all this together a person’s representation of the world (Williams, 1978, p. 64). Suppose that two people, A and B, have different representations of the world. In order to understand how A’s and B’s can be representations of the same reality, we must stand back and form a larger conception of the world that contains A and B and their representations. Then we add person C, and stand back again to include C and her representations with A and B and *their* representations. Suppose that we continue this process until we arrive at a conception that contains all the people in the world and all their representations of the world. Call this conception the “absolute conception”.

If we cannot form such an absolute conception, then, says Williams, we have no conception of “the reality which is there *anyway*”, no conception of any object of which we have knowledge. (According to Williams, Descartes was concerned with knowledge that physics uncovers). So, if “knowledge is possible at all, it now seems, the absolute conception must be possible too” (Williams, 1978, p.65)⁵.

But notice: The absolute conception has no place for anything whatever that is irreducibly first-personal: Each person and his or her conception of the world is represented, but not from any first-personal point of view. The absolute conception is wholly objective. There is no place for a first-person perspective or for any first-person phenomena in the absolute conception.

This raises the question: What happens to the soul in the absolute conception?

If souls are omitted from the absolute conception, but Descartes is committed to them, then the absolute conception is metaphysically incomplete. Well, Descartes may even agree. The motivation for the absolute conception is to map out a domain for knowledge that is produced by physics, but Descartes may think

5 Now Williams formulates a dilemma: On the one hand, the absolute conception may be specified only as “whatever it is that these representations represent”. In that case, the independent reality “slips out of the picture, leaving us only with a variety of possible representations to be measured against each other, with nothing to mediate between them”. On the other hand, we may have some determinate picture of “what the world is like independent of any knowledge or representation in thought. In that case, it seems that we are left only with only one particular representation of the world, “our own, and that we have no independent point of leverage for raising this into the absolute representation of reality” (Williams, 1978, p. 65).

that there is no such knowledge of souls. (Williams suggests something like this at the end of his book. [Williams, 1978, pp. 299-302]). Moreover, Williams says that Descartes's interest "is as much, in fact, more in science as it was in metaphysics" (Williams, 1978, p. 276). In this case, if the soul is not knowable scientifically, then there is no loss in leaving it out of the absolute conception.

Recall: The point of the absolute conception is to have a conception of reality that is wholly independent of us (Williams, 1978, pp. 64-66). If a soul is private to each person, the absolute conception cannot be independent of us if it contains souls. So, let us leave souls out of the absolute conception, and return to Descartes's search for truth.

Perhaps Descartes did not think that there were any truths about the soul since physics does not deliver any knowledge of the soul. It seems to me incoherent to say that souls exist, truths exist, but there are no truths about the soul. (Would not the sentence "There are souls" express a truth?). To say that there are souls, but no truths about souls is tantamount to simply stipulating that there is no truth but physical truth.

In that case, we could interpret Descartes's use of the first-person as being only a stylistic choice, as Williams suggests. It is "a delicate question", Williams says, "at what point the first-personal bias, in any methodologically significant way, takes hold of Descartes's enquiry" (Williams, 1978, p. 68). The questions Descartes wants answered may just as well be of the form "What is true?" or even "What is known?" (*ibid.*) rather than "What can I know?"

Maybe so, but Descartes's method, the project of pure enquiry, still has a first-personal structure. As Williams says, Descartes's method "requires reflection, not just on the world, but on one's experience" (Williams, 1978, p. 69). So, even if Descartes's goal is objective, his method remains first-personal.

If what is presupposed by the possibility of knowledge is the absolute conception, why does it matter how the absolute conception came to be formulated?

The absolute conception itself has no tie at all to the first-person: It is totally objective. Here is a mundane analogy: You walk to the store to buy some milk; if the aim is to obtain milk, what difference does it make whether you walk, ride a bicycle, or take a taxi to the store? It is the milk that counts. Similarly, if there is a wholly objective absolute conception, what difference does it make whether the method used to formulate it is not objective? If what counts is only the absolute conception, then Descartes's picture of the world, surprisingly, is itself wholly objective.

Perhaps Descartes's position was like that of the chemist Kekulé, who discovered the molecular structure of the benzene molecule (a hexagonal ring) while dozing in front of his fireplace in 1865 (Hempel, 1966, p. 16). The point here is that how Kekulé came up with the idea of a hexagonal ring is irrelevant to whether it is

correct. Similarly, if Williams is right, maybe Descartes's method of hyperbolic doubt is irrelevant to how the absolute conception should be regarded⁶. Speaking now for myself, I do not think that Williams' interpretation of Descartes can succeed, for the reason that I do not think that the "absolute conception" can be a complete description of reality, however anybody arrives at it. This is so, because among the representations to be included in the absolute conception will be representations whose existence entails exemplifications of a robust first-person perspective. For example, suppose that I believe that I am going to die young. (OK, too late for that). This thought would appear in the absolute conception as "LB believes that LB is going to die young". But that is not accurate; my belief is about *my* death. To be accurate, the absolute conception would have to represent my belief as "LB believes that she (she herself) is going to die young". But to represent my thought in that accurate way would render the absolute conception not wholly objective, because "LB believes that she (herself) is going to die young" entails that the robust first-person perspective is exemplified. If there were no robust first-person perspective, there could not be such a thought.

So, even disregarding Descartes's first-personal method of arriving at the absolute conception, on my view, the absolute conception could not be a complete ontology. In order to be a conception of "what is there anyway", independently of any thought or experience, the absolute conception must leave out the dispositional property that is the first-person perspective in its robust stage, and hence, on my view, must be incomplete. So, I am even further from Descartes if you ally him to the absolute conception than I am on the standard interpretation.

- 6. Conclusion** In conclusion, even if the standard interpretation of Descartes is correct, and he agrees that there is a non-objective aspect of natural reality, his picture of reality is quite different from mine. Let me review some dissimilarities between a Cartesian approach and my approach. There is first-person epistemic primacy for the Cartesian, but none for

6 Or perhaps Descartes is in a position like John Perry's. Perry says that self-knowledge (in the way that requires what I call the "robust first-person perspective") is just a way of believing things about myself, LB; it is knowledge about myself that I picked up in a typically self-informative way. Knowledge about myself that I would say does not require a robust first-person perspective is knowledge about myself that I picked up in some other (e.g., third-personal) way. Although Perry argues that indexicals like 'I' are essential for explaining action, he thinks that "all facts are objective". He says that he is "not very clear about what would make a fact not objective" (Perry, 2002, p. 239). Well, I think that I know: A fact is not objective if the fact's obtaining entails that someone has a robust first-person perspective. If Descartes thinks that the absolute conception is a complete representation of natural reality, then he, like Perry, should try to explain first-personal phenomena in a way that eliminates them from the ontology.

me; language is individual for the Cartesian, but language is social for me; thinkers are solitary beings for the Cartesian, but thinkers are social beings for me; pure minds exist for the Cartesian, but no subpersonal minds, souls or selves exist for me; the Cartesian endorses substance dualism, but I endorse an indefinitely broad pluralism; the Cartesian aims at a presuppositionless foundation, but I do not; the Cartesian takes a distinction between “what is there *anyway*” and what depends on us (a mind-independent/mind-dependent distinction) to be fundamental, I do not; there is an immaterial “inner” realm for the Cartesian, but no such immaterial “inner” realm for me; there is an infallible method of inquiry for the Cartesian, but no infallible method of inquiry for me. To me, that is quite a significant list of differences.

In short, while I affirm a robust first-person perspective – a capacity that sets mature persons apart from everything else in the world – my view is far from being Cartesian.

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